

# **COLLECTION OVERVIEW**

## **NEAR EAST STUDIES**

### **I. SCOPE**

This overview focuses on Library of Congress holdings of resources concerned with the areas covered by the Near East Section whether these are in custody of the Section or in other units of the Library. The Near East Section holds an estimated 300,000 titles in thirty-six languages including Arabic, Persian, Pushto, Turkish, Armenian, Georgian and the many languages of Central Asia such as Uzbek and Azerbaijani. A greater number of materials are dispersed in the general book and periodical collections, and in the Law, Manuscripts, Geography and Maps, Music and Motion Picture Divisions. Collectively, the Library's collections cover all fields of Middle Eastern studies in all fields of knowledge except clinical medicine and technical agriculture.

### **II. SIZE**

It is difficult to give a piece count of the Library's holdings on the Near East. However, it is estimated that 600,000 volumes of monographs and serials are held in the general collection. Added to the holdings of the Near East Section, the Library's total holdings on the Near East amount to about half a million volumes plus several thousand pieces in different formats. These include materials on the ancient Near East as well as the medieval and modern Near East. Selected statistics on cataloged holdings in the Near East Section are approximately 80,000 titles in literature and 60,000 each in religion, history and social sciences. There are approximately 6,000 Arabic serial titles and 3,000 in the other languages in the custody of the Section. The special format holdings include mostly microfilms and microfiches amounting to approximately 800 newspaper titles and 15,000 monographs. The 6,000 item pamphlet collections, especially the Arabic and Persian, contain all kinds of statements, brochures and newsletters.

### **III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS**

The Library's interest in Near Eastern studies is not recent. The growth of the Library's collection from biblical and archaeological studies and travel books to a comprehensive and integrated research collection culminated in the establishment of the Near East Section in 1945 as the Second World War ended and the United States became more involved in Near Eastern affairs. Since then the Section's staff have built an internationally recognized collection. After the establishment of the Cairo Office in 1962, with the intention and goal of fostering a realistic understanding of the contemporary Arab world, the Section's holdings in the vernacular languages have quadrupled. By taking over the responsibility of acquisitions from the troubled areas of

Iran and Afghanistan, the Karachi Office has helped to keep the Persian and Afghani collections strong and generally broad in the subjects covered.

The Library collections are especially strong in areas such as Islamic studies, literature, history and social sciences. Travel accounts abound in the general collection, as well as translations of literary, religious and historical classics into English and other Western languages. When supplemented by the extensive collections in the General and Southern Asia collections containing translations of the Koran into more than seventy languages and by works on other Islamic legal and religious writings, the Library's collection of Islamica is probably the largest in the world.

Near Eastern government documents such as regulations, censuses, reports and statistics published by the colonial powers and subsequently by the independent Near Eastern states are noteworthy.

#### **IV. AREAS OF DISTINCTION**

The Near East collections are notable for their classical and modern literary holdings. All-important writers, poets and novelists are well represented, including Nobel Laureate Nijib Mahfuz, the Turkish novelist Yasar Kemal, and classical Persian poets, Firdawsi, Hafiz and Sa'di. *The Archives of World Literatures On Tape* includes the recordings of twenty distinguished modern Arab poets and writers. One of the unique collections is the Arab-American newspapers and journal collection. The fundamental importance of this collection lies in the impact that the Arab-American press has had on the modernization of Arab literature and thought during the early part of this century.

Other distinctive holdings are the Mansuri Collection of 1,500 Arabic book manuscripts and 3,500 volumes dealing with Koranic and Islamic studies. The Abdul Hamid II collection, comprising 375 volumes in Turkish and Arabic, represents a cross section of the knowledge available in Turkey at the turn of the last century. Together with the Ottoman Turkish collection of approximately 10,000 titles, the Abdul Hamid II collection of photographs in the Prints and Photographs Division and the Mount Sinai firmans make the Library's holdings on Ottoman Turkey one of the best in this country.

The Library holds two important manuscript collections on microfilm; the Mount Sinai collection of 3,300 manuscripts in twelve languages (mostly Greek but with a substantial numbers in Arabic, Georgian, Armenian, Persian and Turkish), and the Catholic Microfilm Center collection of manuscripts in Arabic and Syriac located in the monasteries and libraries of Lebanon and Syria, the originals of some of which were destroyed during the war in Lebanon.

The early imprints collection of the Near East Section includes Arabic books printed in Rome in 1594 and later. It also contains the second book printed in the Arab world (1706) and 17 titles out of 23 produced by the Muteferrika Press (1727-1744), as well

as a unique collection of Persian lithographed books. The Minassian collection of approximately 400 items of calligraphy sheets and bindings is one of the Library's most valuable holdings (these are now available digitally via the Library's website). Valuable holdings include illuminated Korans and Persian manuscripts.

Other resources are in the Prints and Photograph Division, including the Abdul Hamid II and the Matson collections. The latter consists of 25,000 slides taken during the 1920s and 1930s of events in Palestine in general and Jerusalem in particular. The Music Division holds representative samples of Near Eastern music and Coptic church music, and the Rare Book and Special Collections Division holds translations into Latin of many medieval Arabic doctors, scientists and philosophers. A unique collection held by Rare Books is the 2,500 books collection of translations into Arabic and Persians of American authors.

The Manuscript Division holds early American correspondence concerning North Africa: the papers of Charles Malik, the Lebanese professor who worked with Mrs. Roosevelt at the United Nations in preparing the Universal Human Rights declaration and the papers of Archibald Roosevelt, an important CIA operative in the Middle East during the Second World War.

## **V. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES**

The Library has begun to invest heavily in digital and electronic media, both purchasing commercial products and producing its own digital products. Among those created by the Library of Congress are the Portal Pages for each country for which the Near East Section has responsibility, the website Islamic Manuscripts from Mali (done in conjunction with the African Section) and the website Selections of Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish Calligraphy. The Library is in the process of working with the National Library of Iraq and the National Library of Egypt to create websites of material from those two libraries, which will enhance the Library of Congress' own digitized holdings.

## **VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS**

Generally speaking the Near East Studies Section's collections are weak in pre-1945 publications. Although the Library has tried to fill in the gaps, there is much more that could be done. Many early newspapers, journals, and significant monographs are lacking. Some Central Asian literatures, such as Uzbek, are weak due to past difficulties in dealing with Soviet authorities. The Armenian collection, although it has breadth in some subjects, needs more depth in most of them.

In the general collection, many publications of research value, especially those published by European universities and research centers, are lacking. Another category of lacunae is

serial publications. Many serial sets are incomplete due to factors such as the disorganized book trade, difficulty of communication and transportation in the wide area covered by the Section, and political unrest.